

Consumer Culture in Saudi Arabia:
A Qualitative Study among Heads of Household.

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Signature:

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my family especially:

My father who taught me, how ambitious I should be, he is my inspiration for everything.

My mother who surrounded me with her love, praying for me throughout the time I spent working on my thesis.

To all my brother and sisters (Noura, Hoda, Nasser, Dr Mounera, Abdullah and Abdurrahman).

With a special dedication to my lovely wife (Nawal) and my sons (Mohammed and Feras)

Abstract

As Saudi Arabia turns towards modernisation, it faces many tensions and conflicts during that process. Consumerism is an extremely controversial subject in Saudi society.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the changes that the opportunities and constraints of consumerism have brought about in the specific socio-economic and cultural settings between local traditions, religion, familial networks and institutions, on the one hand, and the global flow of money, goods, services and information, on the other.

A qualitative method was applied. Focusing on Saudi consumer behaviour, the study was explorative; open-ended qualitative interviews and observations were considered to be appropriate methods. The questions covered not only practices of consumption, such as shopping, tourism, leisure time and managing the budget, etc., but also attitudes to consumption in general as well as more general views on social change. In this study the interviews were used and relied upon as the basic method for collecting data. In addition, observation was used to support and supplement the interview data. The research subjects of this study are 29 (male) heads of households/families residing in the three cities of Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam. The focus on fathers/husbands is, of course, immediately recognisable as a limitation of this research.

The results of the study were that the cultural pattern of the Saudi family depends heavily on the Islamic religion, a religious reference that distinguishes it from other cultures, such as volunteer work or a desire to give to charity. The existences of other

factors that contribute to the formation of consumer behaviour of the Saudi family were discovered, including the social background as well as social pressure to apply such behaviour. The results revealed women have also come to play a major role in influencing the purchasing and selection of both the quantity and quality of goods.

The principal conclusion was that despite the obvious manifestations of consumer culture for Saudi families (luxury cars, modern technology, and Western fashion), Saudi society is still loyal to the Islamic religion as a fundamental doctrine. The acceptance of, and trends in, Western-consumer Saudi families do not necessarily mean that there is a Western-driven consumer base depending on the individual. Although Saudi families also enjoy acquiring Western goods and impressive fashions, these may conflict with Islamic and traditional values in general.

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